

**Remarks for James P. Zumwalt
U.S. Ambassador to Senegal
Launch of Activities of YALI Regional Leadership Center West Africa,
Dakar, December 16, 2015**

(As prepared)

Minister of Youth
Director of CESAG
Private sector partners
Young leaders

Good afternoon,

In addressing a room full of young African leaders in Washington this past summer, President Obama referred to his recent trip to the continent.

“I saw the talent of young people all across the continent,” he said, “and that’s why I launched YALI – the Young African Leaders Initiative – to help you access the resources, the training, and the networks you need to become the next generation of leaders in all areas – in civil society, in business, in government.”

YALI is about empowering Africa’s youth – who are well represented in this room today – to take charge of their destiny. YALI enables the next generation to use their talents, hone their ideas, acquire new skills, and together help Africa achieve its tremendous potential.

As we have just heard, the process of young leaders coming together to review and refine the draft curriculum of the West Africa/Dakar Regional Leadership Center began yesterday.

The impressive findings of these initial members will be incorporated into the final curriculum of the Center, which sees its official launch today. Based on the quality of this report, I am certain that we can expect great things from this Center.

We can appreciate the significance of this Regional Leadership Center by remembering its origins. Each year, 500 bright, committed and enthusiastic leaders between the age of 25 and 35 travel to the United States for training in top American universities through the Mandela Washington Fellowship, a component of YALI. Next year it will be 1000 young Africans.

The training includes leadership skills, hands-on community service, and innovative uses of technology for data-driven decision making.

Just after the training, the Fellows receive opportunities for internships, mentoring and professional development, so the momentum they build in the United States continues

after they return home. Many of the Fellows have already become forces of change on this continent.

YALI's initial impact in advancing America's strategic goal of empowering Africa inspired the U.S. government to establish four Regional Leadership Centers on the continent. Unlike the other three Regional Leadership Centers, the Dakar offers training in French as well as Portuguese.

All four Regional Leadership Centers in Africa are managed by strong and credible institutions. It is a particular pleasure to congratulate the *Centre Africain des Etudes Supérieur* – CESAG– on its award to manage the implementation of this important project.

CESAG has been providing high quality training to young leaders for 30 years, and has established itself as a leading institute of higher education on the continent.

CESAG is partnering with other strong regional organizations, such as Synapse Center and West African Research Center, to capitalize on the skills and experience of a variety of strong African institutions. Each of these organizations brings unique skills and experiences to lay a solid foundation for future success.

By providing state-of-the-art training facilities, technology labs and conference space, the Center will link more than 4,000 young African leaders to support their leadership development over the next four years.

Indeed, this is an exciting time for all talented young Africans as they develop a vast network of leaders ready to build the nations they believe in.

At this Center, thousands of young Africans will meet – some face-to-face, others virtually – to incubate new ideas.

They will leverage institutional and human capacity already developed through private sector, civil society, academia, communities and governments in what promises to become one of the top youth training and development institutions in Africa.

I am honored to have the Minister of Youth, Employment, and Civic Engagement, co-preside with me at this event.

The Ministry has been involved since the inception of the Dakar Regional Leadership Center, and is a powerful ally to promote youth leadership and empowerment, and to source ideas from a laboratory of innovations.

I know that youth employment is one of your highest priorities, Mr. Minister. I can assure you that youth leadership in entrepreneurship will be one of your best assets to tackle this challenging issue.

Today's event also provides me with an opportunity to commend the Government of Senegal for its engagement and commitment to youth development.

The uniqueness of the Regional Learning Centers is also rooted in the public private partnership model they embody. Private sector partners such as Master Card, CitiBank, Tigo, and Sonatel, have all already mobilized resources to contribute to this initiative.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all these enterprises for joining the U.S. Government in this initiative, and invite other private sector to join our forces in contributing to shape Africa's future leadership.

To the representatives of the 15 other countries covered by this facility, this Center is for *all* the youth in the region. We will need the support and partnership of your governments, civil society, and private sector to be part of this endeavor.

We depend on your creativity and guidance to bring the full benefits of this Regional Leadership Center to your youth.

I have no doubt that the West Africa/Dakar Regional Learning Center will be a success. The U.S. Embassy here in Senegal will be at your side as you embark on the journey of youth leadership development as it has been envisioned by President Obama. Together, we can achieve great results.

Thank you